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ABSTRACT

Work force development in the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) is affected by sundry but interrelated factors. Included among these are the following: (1) the PRC's population of one billion people; (2) a recent history of political turmoil and violence, resulting in profound changes in national leadership and vacillation in national policy; (3) implementation of "The Great Leap Forward," a plan for modernization that attempts to bring China to the technological level of developed countries by the year 2000; (4) 30 years of a comparative increase in living standards and the escalating expectations of China's populace for an even greater rate of increase; and (5) an educational system incapable of providing much needed higher and technical education to more than 4 percent of middle school graduates. However, the PRC's work force development picture is changing as new strategies are being developed and implemented to meet the country's educational needs. Among those efforts to increase access to technical education in China are widespread broadcast of university-level television instruction; development of state-owned or tertiary industries that provide on-the-job training to unskilled middle school graduates and leavers; and reexamination of existing state-controlled job placement procedures. (MN)

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FACTORS AFFECTING WORK FORCE DEVELOPMENT IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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Note: The following is based on the author's four visits to the People's Republic of China between 1979 and 1981 and on related research.

Work force development in the People's Republic of China (PRC) is affected by sundry but interrelated factors: its population of one billion people, the equivalent of almost one of every four people in the world; a recent history of political turmoil and violence resulting in profound changes in national leadership and vacillation in national policy; a staggeringly ambitious goal of modernization which attempts to bring China to the technological level of developed countries by the year 2000; thirty years of a comparative increase in living standards and the escalating expectations of China's populace for an even greater rate of increase; an educational system incapable of providing much needed higher and technical education to more than 4 percent of middle (equivalent to American secondary) school graduates; its labor intensive economy so necessary to the employment of a work force of over 500 million and yet so counterproductive to much needed efficient economic growth; a system of state controlled job placement and guaranteed life long employment with the hypostatic bureaucracy to implement the system; and finally, the increasing influence of Western cultures and conflicting values.

Population

China's population and projected growth rate is increasingly affecting work force development. China's population has almost doubled in slightly more than three decades, from 580 million people in 1949, the year of liberation marking the beginning of the People's Republic of China, to one billion people in 1981. Throughout this time China's population has become progressively younger. According to the State Family Planning Commission (Li, 1982), as of 1980 half of the total population was under 20; sixty-five percent of the population was under 30. And in a land where the respected elder was a traditional symbol, only 5 percent of the people were older than 65.

The translation into numbers is staggering: 500 million people under 20 years of age; more than 600 million under 30. There are 200 million teenagers and an additional 160 million people in their 20's; 380 million are less than 16 years old.

Projections based on current birth rates are no less phenomenal. As a result of two population booms in the 50's and 60's, there were in 1980 122.5 million women of reproductive age (20-49) who had an average of 2.3 babies. Continuing at the present rate of growth China's population by the year 2000 would rise to 1.25 billion. One hundred years from now it would be an overwhelming 2.5 billion.

Chinese officials are greatly concerned about the consequences of an uncontrolled birth rate and have taken increasingly severe measures to develop a nation where one child per family will be the standard for the next 25 years. But traditions in China compete fiercely with changing ideologies and perhaps nowhere is this conflict more apparent than in the present government policy on birth control and the limitation of family size

to one child. For centuries, the Chinese fostered large, extended families. Tradition favored sons whose labor in the field was a necessity for survival. Even today, 80 percent of the Chinese (800 million strong) live in rural areas and are supported by or derive their livelihood from farming and farm-related work.

Chinese tradition mandated that children, specifically sons, care for parents throughout old age. Consequently, a necessary form of old age insurance was a large number of children, especially sons. The latest Chinese doctrine attempts to allay the fears of poverty and abandonment at old age by promoting pensions. But pensions are presently given only to employees of state-owned factories and collectives which account for only a small percentage of China's work force. Policies governing the large proportion of the population living in rural communes promote care of the aged by the commune. But with China's everchanging emphases, present policy is little comfort to adults living in regions where Beijing (the capitol city) is but a name of some far-off land.

China's move toward supporting private enterprise is working against its policies of limiting family size. For example, peasants are not only allowed but are encouraged to farm small private plots of land (usually given to them by the commune) in order to supplement the national supply of agricultural products necessary to support the population of one billion people. Production quotas are contracted to individual households and consequently, with more children, more laborpower will be available to meet higher education quotas. This in turn will bring in more income and lead to a higher standard of family living.

The effects of China's birth control policy are difficult to determine at this time. For example, according to a Wall Street Journal report

(Vink, 1981), approximately 26% of all babies born in the southeast province of Guandong, one of China's most densely populated, were at least third children. According to the Beijing Review ("Population Growth Rate," 1981), "marked results have been achieved in controlling the nations' population growth" as the birth rate has dropped from 20.99 per thousand in 1973 to 11.7 per thousand in 1979. Shanghai was cited to have a birthrate of only 5.31 per thousand with more than 80 percent of the new babies being first-born; only .5 percent were third-born.

My discussions with cadres, workers, and guides have verified my belief that the birth rate and acceptance of birth control varies with one's locale, education, occupation and age. Young urban people who view as more important the material amenities and who have never experienced extensive toiling on the land, tend to accept the party line that national good should take precedence over individual desires and that one-child families are in the "national good." To those who were born in the 50's and who are now in what is considered in China to be the prime child bearing age, one child, especially if it is a girl, is not enough. And to those elders who witnessed China as an imperial colony, the "war of liberation," the promise of the "Great Leap Forward," the consequences of letting "one hundred flowers bloom," and most recently the extremes and uncertainties of a Cultural Revolution, a large family is the only source of security. Although the number of elders is small, their traditional influence is a factor which cannot be overlooked.

The Cultural Revolution

A major factor in work force development is the effect of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The revolution began in 1966 and, coupled with the reign of the Gang of Four, lasted through a tumultuous

decade. The Cultural Revolution was a purge of the Chinese Communist Party, led by the followers of Mao Zedong (Tse-Tung). A major goal was to equalize the influences of an emerging class of privileged bureaucrats and intellectuals, which Mao saw increasing in power within the Chinese Communist Party and threatening his supremacy, with the influences of the masses. One of Mao's principal aims was to transform China's Socialist society based on the principle "to each according to his work," to an egalitarian, classless society of pure Communism based on the principle "to each according to his needs." The former was based on material incentives and wage differentials, the latter on mass equality.

Mao saw China's youth as the key to his transformation plan and consequently he and his followers started working through the schools to mobilize support. This led to the formation of the infamous Red Guards, the first unit of which was formed in 1966 in a Beijing (Peking) secondary school (Keesing's Research Report, 1967). Using the youth, Mao sought to rid China of what was labeled as revisionism, the emphasis of professionalism over ideology, in such areas as industry, education, medicine, and the military.

The Cultural Revolution and the reign of the Gang of Four had a profound effect on education and a devastating effect on industry and work force development. Prior to the Cultural Revolution, vocational education and technical training were integral parts of China's work force development. In many areas, more than half of the middle school students participated in some form of skill training. Post-secondary technical schools, often operated by industry in industrial settings, supplemented the secondary school programs.

But all such programs were abolished during the revolution as the students indoctrinated into the Red Guard violently disrupted and often curtailed both education and production. Cadres (administrators, supervisors, officials) and leading workers were "sent down" to the countryside for "re-education." Untrained peasants (farm workers) were sent to the factories as replacements in an effort to purge "revisionists" from education, industry, medicine, and the military. Their major qualification was loyalty to Mao's new revolutionary doctrines.

During the revolution the length of general schooling was shortened. Technical schools and universities, identified as roads to revisionism, were closed. Many never reopened. In those that did, admission was granted not on the basis of entrance examinations or academic potential but upon political allegiance and peer nomination. Work force development programs were redesigned to equalize the masses ideologically as opposed to producing a stratified work force based on individual potential and investment in human capital.

Although the Cultural Revolution and the reign of the Gang of Four lasted only ten years, officially, more than a decade of China's industrial and economic development was lost. Almost an entire generation of Chinese, millions strong, lost their educational opportunities. Millions more, in the prime of their lives, were torn from promising careers and jobs. Fifteen years later, many still have not returned.

The resulting frustration and bitterness is evident among the Chinese people and probably will affect the development of China's work force for decades to come. For example, because of China's policy of life-long employment, commonly known as the "iron rice bowl," the cadres and workers promoted during the Cultural Revolution are still holding their

positions. In many instances, workers whom they replaced have been reinstated in parallel positions causing internal conflict. Workers who were formerly Red Guards during their teens and early 20's are now ostracized for their revolutionary roles; many conceal their part in a movement which once idolized them.

Modernization and Economic Readjustment

The "Great Leap Forward," announced in 1958, was heralded at the time as a plan to achieve maximum mobilization of China's labor force by harnessing the revolutionary enthusiasm of the masses. Farmers were encouraged to produce iron and steel in backyard smelters. "Half-work, half-study" schools, (referred to by some as "half-work, half-politics" schools) were advocated to increase access to education while minimizing the costs of such schooling. The Great Leap faltered but was quickly followed in the early 1960's by another, even more ambitious plan designed to move China, by the year 2000, to the high levels of technology found in the advanced nations of the world. Called the Four Modernizations, its principals were outlined by Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai (Chou En-lai).

Emphasis on the modernizations was minimized during the Cultural Revolution. But with the purge of the Gang of Four shortly after the death of Chairman Mao in September 1976, the newly named Chairman, Hua Guofeng, emphasized the need for renewed stability and unity and rallied the nation's efforts towards the goals of modernization outlined over a decade ago. By 1979, however, it was again evident that the modernization was in danger. The new remedy, presently in effect, was a series of progressive reforms called the Economic Readjustment.

A major result of the Economic Readjustment has been the changed nature of the money supply and the introduction of the profit motive in

the operations of factories, agricultural communes, and other enterprises. Prior to the Economic Readjustment capital and operating revenues were distributed at the state's recommendation by financial institutions such as the People's Bank of China. The money was appropriated by the ministry of finance according to central planning with no plan for repayment and no charge for interest. The state merely took all profits made by the organization receiving the grant. If an operating loss was sustained, it was covered by the state. This obviously did little to promote productivity and the development and efficient utilization of the work force.

All enterprises are now expected to make a profit, part of which is to be kept by the enterprise for further reinvestment and distribution to workers in the form of various bonuses calculated on work points earned by the workers. Equally important is the absorption of financial losses by each enterprise. Factories and other organizations are now faced with decisions which ultimately end with the making of profits as opposed to merely keeping people employed.

Under the Economic Readjustment, individuals are encouraged to go into business for themselves. Although the scale of this private enterprise is limited to comparatively small operations, it is nevertheless increasing. (Private enterprise is referred to in China as "tertiary industry" and is described further in the Education and Training section of this paper.) Only a few short years ago, the notion of going into business for oneself was unheard of, supposedly a practice violating the foundations upon which New China was based. Now such activity is heralded in Cninese periodicals as an important link in the move toward modernization.

Education and Training

Current education and training systems are inadequate to develop the work force necessary to achieve the goal of modernization and improved quality of life. The post-Cultural Revolution emphasis on basic and vocational education and technical training is hampered by a lack of trained teachers, necessary facilities and a multiplying population. Even though educational expenditures in 1980 were 60 percent more than in 1976, the per capita expenditure was lower than that in the 60's. Today, a young person's chance of entering college is half what it was before 1966.

There are slightly over 200 million students in China, roughly the equivalent of the total population of the United States. Each year, anywhere from 7 to 10 million students graduate from China's middle schools. Millions more leave school without graduating. Only about 4 to 6 percent of the graduates pursue further study at colleges and universities; another 2 percent have had some vocational or technical training. Thus over 90 percent of China's young people are untrained for any kind of skilled work and must be absorbed annually by a labor force already overburdened with unskilled workers.

"Vocational and technical education is one of the high priorities in China today," a member of the Ministry of Education told me in 1979 (Ministry of Education, 1979). But China's emphasis on work force development goes well beyond the traditional school structure. Emphasis on the goal of modernization, coupled with the dearth of training programs, facilities and staff has faced China with a tremendous shortage of skilled workers, technicians, managers and administrators. To develop the needed labor force, China is promoting work force development through a network of various adult education programs. The most comprehensive of these is a category referred to as "part-time" education.

While it is difficult to obtain an exact enrollment in part-time education, it is estimated that tens of millions of workers, peasants, and cadres are involved in some form of part-time study. (Part-time programs were previously referred to as spare-time programs. The terms "part-time" and "spare-time" are often used interchangeably.) The Shanghai Workers Part-Time University with ten branch colleges is an example of a flourishing program. From a total enrollment of approximately 17,000 students, 6,000 come to class at the colleges; the remaining 11,000 attend university classes through television facilities. Both day and night courses are offered. In Beijing a new part-time college opened it doors in February, 1981 as part of an increasing effort to raise the educational level of municipal staff members and workers. The college is one of several hundred part-time educational facilities located in and around China's capital.

Competition for credit enrollment in part-time programs is strong. Admission includes a recommendation from the student's work unit, successful completion of an entrance examination, completion of senior middle school or its equivalent, and three years of work experience. For the new Beijing college, more than 3,500 candidates were recommended by their factories and production units; 885 were selected to be part of the first class.

Part-time programs may last anywhere from several months to several years. At the Beijing school, students attend classes three half-days and two evenings every week while receiving full pay. Tuition is covered by the work unit of each student. Both general and technical education is provided. Popular courses include the study of technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign language and environmental protection, a new field in China particularly promoted in large urban areas where pollution is a major problem.

Part-time education may be offered through many agencies including city trade unions, technical schools, colleges and universities. The new school in Beijing, for example, was founded by the Beijing Municipal Council of Trade Unions.

Instructional Television

The largest university in China is the Central Broadcasting and Television University (CBTU). Headquartered in Beijing, it is referred to as Television University. A growing number of colleges and universities supplement the work of the CBTU with their own television studios and programs.

CBTU was founded in 1979 and presently has 410,000 regular students scattered throughout almost all parts of China. In addition, approximately 200,000 students are auditing courses while countless more benefit from informal viewing. Regular students are enrolled for credit after having been recommended for study by their work unit and after passing entrance examinations. Those who successfully complete a prescribed program are awarded a certificate or appropriate academic degree. (As of January 1, 1981, China started conferring the academic degrees of B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. in accordance with the practice in most countries of the world.)

A most attractive feature of televised education (considered a form of part-time education) is the opportunity to provide education and training through China to millions of workers without disrupting those workers from their jobs. Eighteen basic and specialized courses were offered by CBTU through a teaching schedule of more than 30 hours per week as of January, 1981. The courses can be divided into two categories: 1) technical courses such as mechanics, electronics, and agricultural science; and 2)

general education including mathematics, physics, chemistry, and foreign language. The study of foreign languages is an important component of post-secondary technical training. Competence in a foreign language is essential for reading original technical materials. English is the most common foreign language offered.

Televised education is under the joint sponsorship of the Ministry of Education and the Broadcasting Administrative Bureau.

"Tertiary" Programs

Prior to 1978, most people in China were employed through a system of state-owned enterprises. Realizing that the needs of the country and its people for goods and services were not being met through this system and that the problem of youth unemployment was increasing, the State has started to encourage the growth of tertiary industries and related training programs.

Tertiary industries include the manufacture of daily necessities, handicrafts, furniture, foodstuffs, and services such as transportation, house repairs, catering and the operation of small food concessions. The industries are established as local or neighborhood collectives, usually with government support. In 1980, more than half of the newly employed were absorbed by a collectively owned enterprise. For the millions of unskilled students annually graduating or leaving middle schools, the vocational training provided through tertiary industries is becoming increasingly important. The educational programs are small and informal, usually consisting of on-the-job training for entry level positions.

Officially, Chinese policy maintains there is no unemployment, only "workers waiting for jobs." State support for the development of tertiary industries is becoming increasingly important to the solution of what to do with "workers waiting for jobs."

On-the-Job Training

On-the-job training continues to prepare most workers for their first job, usually an unskilled or semiskilled position. Such programs may last for a period of a few weeks to several years, depending on the complexity of the job. On-the-job trainees receive a base pay plus welfare and medical benefits. An incentive bonus may be earned on jobs where such bonuses are given regular workers.

Apprenticeship is still an important method of preparing skilled workers. Although the system existed in China for centuries, it was given formal recognition immediately after the liberation in 1949. An apprentice is usually a graduate of a junior middle school (8th grade). Typically, the apprentice receives no wages, only an allowance for food, clothing, and living expenses. In addition, the apprentice receives free medical care and has access to welfare facilities and the equivalent of disability insurance. A typical apprenticeship lasts three years but it may vary from two to four years depending on the job.

On-the-job training will continue to be an important part of China's work force development for many years to come.

Job Placement and Bureaucracy

Job placement until recently was the responbility of the State. Individuals were assigned jobs through a bureaucratic process on the basis of a master plan for labor determined at the State, commune, or city level. Once assigned, a cadre's or worker's job was considered guaranteed for life regardless of the quality or quantity of work performed. The concept of guaranteed life-long employment is coming under increasing scrutiny. Personal discussion with workers and cadres and a review of current

literature reveals a strong sentiment for the elimination of State mandated job placement and guaranteed life-time employment.

But change will not come easily. China has contrived a seemingly immovable bureaucracy which, as Premier Zhao Ziyang expressed in a speech to the National People's Congress, is "an important obstacle to our new approach to economic development and the realization of our modernization program" (Ching, 1982). For example, there are about 1,000 ministers and vice ministers in the central government with some ministries having as many as 20 or more vice ministers. This structure is multiplied many times at provincial and local levels since for each ministry in the central government, there is a corresponding bureau in each province staffed by a staggering number of bureau heads and deputy bureau heads.

Many present-day officials were elevated to their positions during the Cultural Revolution. They have been joined more recently by the reinstated officials whom they replaced, thus creating a parallel structure of cadres. Because of China's tumultuous past, individuals who are presently in the bureaucracy are there because they have survived political battles and in-fighting and the bureaucratic savvy they have accumulated guides then in maintaining a network which will insure them employment with power and prestige in their senior years.

The implications of this gigantic bureaucracy for changes in work force development are staggering. Decision making is a tedious and often frustrating process since each of the many high officials in effect has veto power. Approval for anything is usually obtained through the passing of documents from one official to another and any official may, for whatever reason, raise questions which will send the document back several months for further study.

Most recently, attention has been given to a system of worker and cadre placement based on previous achievement, individual potential and preference. There is an increasing interest in American-style management in which each level of management is given a certain amount of defined authority. Such a system, however, has practical limitations in a country where access to occupational education and training is limited and where travel for the ordinary citizen is prohibited. A major reason for China's agricultural, industrial, and economic achievements since its founding in 1949 has been the highly regulated deployment of workers and cadres and any rapid, large-scale deviation from that practice in a population of one billion people could, at this time, be disastrous.

Reflections and Implications

As one views the policy changes which seem to be a way of life in China, it is easy to understand personal conflicts relating to individual career development. The memories of counteractive ideologies forced upon the populace within a span of a few short years are strong. Former children and teenagers, now workers and cadres, who were in their most impressionable years during the turmoil of the 60's and 70's personally witnessed the demise and denouncement of one of China's greatest leaders, Mao Zedong, and his ultimate demotion from immortal to ordinary mortal. Now there are new signs of revising Mao Zedong Thought.

It is difficult to dispute that China has developed at an unprecedented rate since its founding in 1949. Its population has almost doubled from 548 million to one billion; the number of new industries has increased daily by approximately 21; as of 1980, there were over 350,000 state- and collectively-owned industrial enterprises. New emphasis is being placed on small, individually operated businesses. Communicable diseases, by most

accounts, have been eradicated; the mortality rate has dropped from 28 per thousand to 6.2 per thousand in 1980. Life expectancy has increased from 36 years to 68 years.

But with increased human well-being new problems are emerging. The decreased mortality rate and increased birth rate have created a population majority of more than 650 million who do not remember the pre-1949 China and thus find it difficult to accept mere ideological rhetoric and slogans. The historic accounts of Mao's "Long March," legends which provided the spiritual fabric to overcome the physical hardships amid a material vacuum during China's formative years are devoid of emotional association.

A current Party platform urges young people to "take your destiny in your hands." Only a few years ago the Party was using tactics of mass mobilization to achieve national goals. Beginning in autumn of 1981, the Ministry of Education introduced in all primary school grades a subject on ideology and conduct. The goal of this program is to develop a "new, well educated generation with good morality" (Sredl, 1981, p. 11). The movement emphases five "stresses" (decorum, manners, hygiene, discipline and morals) and four "points of beauty" (beauty of mind, language, behavior, environment). How will the "stresses" and "points of beauty" affect the quality of China's future workers"? Will the movement be a lasting one or will it be only rhetoric replaced by new rhetoric in the near future?

The concept of egalitarianism for years dictated that all worker's wages be equal, regardless of training, education, and position. Metaphorically speaking, this practice was referred to as "everybody eating out of the same pot." But recently, leading members of the State Council have repeatedly stressed that the "road forward for our economy lies in

enhancing economic results. This can only be achieved through mobilizing the masses' initiative and creativeness, tapping the potential in every field, reducing waste and using every means to raise beneficial results." So now an old socialist principle is being revived to replace the system of equal wages: "from each according to his ability, to each according to his work."

To many Western business people, China looms as a huge market for products ranging from technology and related training to management development services. But Western entrepreneurs, both individual and corporate, who have obtained access to China's markets have realized that the Chinese are a courteous but cautious and patient people historically wary of "foreign guests." Many Chinese still view inhabitants of the outside world as barbaric. They feel that the decadent Western society is destined for destruction despite, or perhaps as a result of, its technological achievements.

During my first visit to China in 1979, I discussed with a member of the Ministry of Education China's views on adopting a system of education found in America or some other country. His clear reply is symbolic of China's views on doing business with foreigners. China is definitely interested, he said, in looking at all the educational and training systems in developed countries and in fact has started a systematic on-site review of various programs through visiting delegations. Chinese representatives will report to China on the strengths and weaknesses of each system and from this China will form its own system. The Chinese are not, he emphasized, interested in adopting the educational program of any country on a whole-sale basis.

What came through strongly was the pride in an implied slogan: "Made in China by Chinese." The pride of determination, ability and accomplishment was nourished early in the history of New China. In July, 1960, the Soviets terminated the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance, abruptly withdrawing their 12,000 technicians and advisors. Many Chinese factories and other major construction projects were left partially completed; other projects were abandoned on the drawing boards. The most strategic disruption was the building of the Changchiang Bridge (Yangste River Bridge), considered by many to be the jugular vein of China's transportation system. I will always remember the pride of the Chinese guide who, upon my visit to the bridge, told me and all those who would listen that it was the Chinese, their ideas, their engineering, their technology, and most important their determination, which completed the bridge, and only one year behind the schedule the unfaithful Russians had set.

As Arthur Miller wrote (Morath, I. & Miller, A., 1979), "One learns soon enough that only a fool understands the Chinese quickly." Although the market for services and technology to refine China's intricate structure of work force development is immense, it will be naive for Westerners to prescribe hasty solutions to China's problems.

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